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ABSTRACT

Recent literature on children's conceptions of social institutions is reviewed, and the results of a pilot study on children's concepts of human rights are described. A series of interview questions was developed based on rights specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Questions in Part I of the interview concerned a presumed violation of each right ("If in another country it was decided that it was all right to buy and sell people like slaves, so that the country had no rules or laws saying that was wrong, would that be right?"). Follow-up questions were asked to assess the child's reasoning. Additional questions were included to determine whether children of different ages made a distinction between transgressions of human rights and of social conventions. In Part II of the interview students were asked about their understanding of the term "human rights," and about their knowledge of rights in other countries and of means to enhance human rights. Two different forms of the interview were used, the first with 30 students from grades 4, 6, and 8, and the second with five students from grade 8 and four students from grade 4. In general, the majority of the children at all three ages said that various violations would be wrong even when there were no laws prohibiting the violations. However, when asked if these violations would be wrong if there was a law which allowed them, many of the children gave reasons to justify the situations. Examples of children's reasoning from both parts of the interview are cited in detail. (Author/SS)

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Children's Concepts of Human Rights and Social Cognition [1, 2]

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During the last five years the literature in the field of social cognition has achieved an amazing diversity and depth. Empirical descriptions of children's reasoning about many realms of social life now exist, and middle range theories have been formulated in a number of areas. Some gaps do exist, however. In particular, when psychologists speak of children and their relation to social institutions they are usually referring to the family, friends or the friendship group, and the school. Social cognition has meant, with a few exceptions, cognition about real life face-to-face social encounters or, in some cases, face-to-face encounters which a child might imagine. Damon (1977), for example, excluded from his imaginative study of social knowledge "children's knowledge of adult social concerns." (1977, p. 337).

There are, of course, some exceptions to this generalization about the limits of existing research. Adelson and Gallatin interviewed pre-adolescents and adolescents from England, Germany, and the United States asking them to place themselves in imaginary situations on a desert island and then probed issues such as individual rights and the public good (Gallatin and Adelson, 1971). Connell (1971) interviewed Australian children about political figures and institutions and applied concepts such as assimilation to schemas to interpret their responses. More recently Furth (1978) has reported an interview study of young English children (aged five to eleven) and their images of social and economic institutions. At least with the younger respondents this focussed primarily on their face-to-face contacts with store keepers, bus drivers, and teachers. Turiel's work (1978), which has helped to clarify the distinction between social conventions and morality has also been important, as he and his colleagues have asked children to make judgments about events which extend and generalize beyond the peer group, the school, and the family.

There is, in addition, a great deal of research which has focussed on political socialization -- the child's acquisition of concepts and attitudes relating to the political system. The social cognition work of psychologists has only recently begun to influence the political socialization work of political scientists (and not in a very systematic way).

The International Year of the Child is an especially appropriate time to reflect on ways to fill this gap between studies of social cognition and those of political socialization. The designation of this special year by the United Nations also highlights the global context for these studies and suggests their potential relation to international organizations and instruments.

The first and perhaps most important question is whether institutions (either domestic or international in character) have a status in the lives of children which suggests that these concepts are important. Although studies of political socialization are often dismissed as being overly mechanistic, researchers in this area do recognize the long range implications of raising a generation of future adults who will be supportive (or non-supportive) of a democratic system of government for the future shape of society--something which is less frequently an explicit concern of psychologists.

Although discussion of U.S. foreign policy on human rights is certainly not part of the everyday discourse of elementary school students, after about the age of six or seven (and in some cases a bit earlier) most are at least aware of the social fabric which surrounds them -- the American political system and the President as well as a world which is larger than the physical regions which they have personally visited. Their knowledge is fragmentary and in many cases inaccurate. That which they have personally experienced -- going to a political rally with their parents or meeting someone from abroad who speaks a different language -- has more meaning than more impersonal facts. But, although social institutions and wider groups to which they belong (the nation, the human species) may be vague, they nevertheless are reference groups for many children. (See,for example, the study of Montemayor and Eisen, 1977.)

Furth (1978) has summarized the problem of asking young children about these matters by noting that "societal institutions are not really concrete things but systems of interrelations that balance individual with community needs, the present with the past and the future, the concrete happening with what is theoretically possible." (Furth, 1978, p. 121). Furth refers to the systemic-analytic mode of functioning as necessary before young people can be thought of as truly understanding societal institutions. Many concur that it is in middle childhood and early adolescence that cognition and attitudes about social institutions develop especially rapidly. I have argued elsewhere, in fact, that middle childhood is a kind of critical period in social development especially with regard to acquiring orientations to the world and people in other nations (Torney, in press). Hill and Palmquist (1978) stress the use of the study of social cognition as an integrative theme in the study of early adolescents. To understand growth in understanding social institutions requires, therefore, a relatively intense study of the years from about eight to fourteen. This is slightly older than most of the groups interviewed in social cognition research to this point.

To understand growth in understanding social institutions also requires, in my opinion, an approach which lies somewhere between the Piagetian cognitive-developmental model (which has stressed stages in the child's construction of social reality) and the socialization model (which has most frequently focussed on the intended transmission of specific standards of behavior from socializing agent to socializee). The process is neither as free as the former model might suggest nor as constrained as the the later model would argue.

Assuming that there is some merit in studying children's concepts of social institutions and that concepts of rights should be defined in reference to such institutions, how should the content area be defined? I would argue that a useful way of investigating children's rights is by interviewing them about those rights which individuals possess by virtue of being human. And just as one does not inquire about children's concept of authority by asking them to define authority, the question "what are human rights?" is not necessarily the one to ask to ascertain that concept either. One needs to seek a definition of rights at a deeper and more general level which can be linked to studies in developmental psychology.

Turiel (1978) uses the term "moral" to apply to a quite limited set of issues -- the value of life, physical and psychological harm to others, violations of rights, and deprivation of something to which a person is entitled.

> In contrast to (social) convention, moral considerations stem from factors intrinsic to actions: consequences such as harm inflicted upon others, violations of rights, effects on the general welfare. (Turiel, p. 5)

Because his purpose is primarily to elaborate the domain of social convention, he does not devote extensive attention to elaborating the meaning of rights or the general welfare in this context. I would argue that this definition of morality may in fact be very close to those human rights which are universally recognized which are related to the psychological and physical integrity of persons. The deep structure of respect for human beings and the rights to which they are entitled by virtue of being human may be the basis of the moral sense which leads children to distinguish between the wrongness of hurting someone on purpose and the wrongnesss of eating while standing up (a distinction which Nucci and Turiel, 1978, have shown that pre-school children can make). This deep structure of respect may also be closely related to the empathy for suffering which even young children seem to experience (Hoffman, 1977).

The deep structure of respect for humanity is, I would submit, universal and accounts also for the respect for privacy which Altman argues exists in all cultures. He notes that cultures which do not make physical arrangements for privacy, instead have extensive taboos which prohibit looking at areas occupied by other families or use other social mechanisms to protect privacy. He concludes that

> The ability to regulate interaction is necessary for individual and cultural survival, and unless people have figured out a way to control interaction, their status as human beings can well be in jeopardy. (Altman, 1977, p. 82)

Furthermore, and perhaps most important, this deep structure of respect for human beings has been expressed in concrete form in various international institutions -- in particular the United Nations -- and in instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN more than thirty years ago. There is consensus among scholars of international law that the human rights and fundamental freedoms set down in the International Bill of Rights have in theory been accepted by Member States of the United Nations as universally applicable (Buergenthal, 1979). Among what are called the basic rights included in the Universal Declaration are the right not to be tortured, the right not to be kept in slavery, and the right not to be arrested and arbitrarily imprisoned without a trial. Many scholars of international law believe that this is a basic core of human rights to which particular societies may add but from which they cannot subtract.

It is of theoretical interest to inquire whether there is such a deep structure of respect for human rights in children or adults. It is also of some practical importance to better understand the views of international

issues including human rights held by children if one is interested in formulating more effective educational programs in this area. What concepts of rights do children understand? How are their attitudes organized? What changes take place with increasing age? What experiences influence the formation and change of those attitudes? How much do children understand about the global system and international processes by the time they are twelve or thirteen? (see Buergenthal and Torney, 1976 and 1979.)

There has been some educationally related work on students' concepts of rights in a domestic context. Torney, Oppenheim and Farnen(1975), for example, found that the responses of young people in nine countries to scales measuring acceptance of various rights -- the right to criticize the government, freedom of the press, the rights of minority groups, equal treatment for individuals with unpopular views, political rights for women -- clustered together to form a factor of Support for Democratic Values on which students in Germany, the Netherlands and Finland scored especially high. Zellman and Sears (1971) reported that agreeing with an abstract slogan expressing support for freedom of speech did not predict the granting of free speech in a concrete situation where a dissenting outgroup wished to state an unpopular opinion.

The work of Adelson and Gallatin (mentioned earlier) investigates issues closer to the question of concepts of rights. Three hundred young people from the United States, England, and West Germany were interviewed. EAch was asked to imagine that a thousand people had become dissatisfied with their government and moved to an island in the Pacific. Their task was to design and establish a new political order. A set of standard questions was asked, concerning dilemmas involving law and government, individual rights, crime and punishment, and the like. The developmental differences were somewhat more striking than the national differences.

> With increasing age, younsters in all three Western democracies exhibited an increasing commitment both to the rights of the community and the rights of the individual -- what might be called a kind of "social contract" mentality. But, the actual terms of the contract seemed to differ from country to country. (Gallatin, 1976, p. 304)

She argues that the younger children in the study had little grasp of the concept of rights. Older subjects were also more likely to appeal to a principle of some sort when asked for clarification, while the younger subjects found difficulty in justifying their responses. Adolescents seemed to weigh decisions by balancing individual freedom and public welfare.

In order to fill in some of the gaps in the research literature and investigate concepts of rights in the context of social institutions, a study is being planned (perhaps to be conducted on a cross national basis), and a pilot study has been completed. The social institutions to which young people are asked to respond are broader than the home, school and peer group. Some other studies have determined rights dilemmas on an ad hoc basis according to what the investigator thought students might respond to. In this study, in contrast, questions about specific rights are taken from internationally recognized instruments for the protection of human rights which express the consensus of many nations concerning these issues, and which have status in international law.

Pilot Study Methodology

A series of interview questions were developed based on rights specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The following articles from the Declaration were used:

> Article 4 -- No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.
>
> Article 26, #1 -- Everyone has the right to education.
>
> Article 13, #1 -- Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
>
> Article 9 -- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.
>
> Article 10 -- Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charges against him.
>
> ARticle 21, #1 -- Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
>
> Article 5 -- No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
>
> Article 19 -- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

The selected articles included certain basic rights which are related to physical and psychological integrity of person (right not to be held in slavery or tortured), certain civil and political rights (right to take part in government), and a social and economic right (regarding standard of living). A question concerning a presumed violation of each right was constructed using a format similar to that employed by Turiel. For example, the child was asked, "If in another country it was decided that it was all right to buy and sell people like slaves, so that the country had no rules or laws saying that was wrong, would that be right?" Follow-up questions were asked to assess the child's reasoning.

Some questions were also included dealing with violations of what Turiel calls social conventions. For example, "what if people in another country always shook hands with their left hand instead of their right; would that be right?" These questions were included to deterine whether children of different ages made a distinction between transgressions of human rights and of social conventions (parallel to the distinctions Turiel has found between morality and social convention).

A second section of the interview included general questions concerning human rights. Students were asked if they had ever heard the term and what they thought it meant. They were asked to point out countries on an outline map where people did not have many rights; they were asked what kinds of rights people in other countries wanted to have. The last section of the interview dealt with children's conceptions about the protection of human rights and what might be done to enhance world wide enjoyment of these rights.

Two different forms of the interview were used, the first with thirty 4th, 6th, and 8th grade students (ten from each grade with equal numbers of boys and girls) and the second with five 8th graders and four 4th graders. They all came from a lower middle class parochial elementary school in Chicago, were all white and within the average range of intelligence. The interviewer was a white male graduate student in developmental psychology. The interviews, which took about thirty minutes, were conducted in a room in the school.

Results of Pilot Study

First, we will summarize the overall reactions of students in terms of their rejection or acceptance of human rights violations. Two kinds of questions were asked. The first type asked whether the specific violation was wrong in a country where it had been decided that it was right so that there were no rules or laws against it. A second type of question was also asked -- whether the violation would be wrong if the country passed a law saying that it was right.

The vast majority of children at all three ages in response to the first type of question responded that slavery, limitations on movement and residence, prolonged jailing, deprivation of a fair trial, unequal opportunity for schooling, lack of representative government, torture performed to obtain evidence of criminal guilt, and not informing members of a prisoner's family of his/her whereabouts would be wrong even if there were no rules or laws prohibiting them. Out of thirty-nine children, none believed that slavery or limitations on movement could be justified, for example. So many of the youngest children (who were about nine) were convinced of the wrongness of all of these violations that there was a ceiling on any age differences. This is consistent with Nucci and Turiel's study concerning young children's response to moral issues placed in a face-to-face context.

Although there was near unanimity in responses to questions of the first type, when presented with a law which allowed (or even instituted) a violation in a question of the second type, children would often think up justifying situations. Responses to both types of questions will be cited in some detail for several of the specific rights.

Right not to be held in slavery -- Although all of the respondents said that slavery would be wrong even if there were no laws prohibiting it, there were some age differences in justifications in response to follow-up questions. Let us examine some answers, these from a fourth grade girl:

I: If people in another country decided it was all right to buy and sell people like slaves and they had no rules or laws against that, would that be right?

S: No, everybody should be equal, no matter what your race, religion or color.

I: If they passed a law that said that slavery was right, would it be right then?

S: Maybe, if they had a law saying slaves are equal, even if they are working for you. They should get the same food and clothes and all.

Next, there are the responses of a fourth grade boy:

I: ...if there were no rules or laws against slavery, would that be right?

S: No, people should all be equal and should have the rights to do anything.

I: Why is that?

S: Because God made us equal.

I: If the law said it was OK, would it be right then?

S: Yes, because that's the head of the country and we have to listen to him.

Both of these children cited equality as the principle on which they decided that slavery was wrong. In fact, in response to this question more than a third of the children mentioned equality while another third mentioned freedom. A few students referred to the inhumanity of treating persons as objects. One girl answered, "people aren't products." and another when asked how people got right answered that they "got them by being alive." To probe the human-non-human distinction, in a few of the later interviews another question was added, "why can you own an animal but not a person?" One child responded, "animals don't talk and tell you they have rights." This question evoked concrete answers from younger children ("you have to feed an animal"), while older children were more likely to refer to a person's ability to think or have feelings. Children at all three ages had considerable empathy for the way slaves might feel -- "lower than someone," "just a possession," or "angry." But these statements tended to be elicited only by specific questions regarding the feelings of persons who were slaves and not as reasons given spontaneously not to allow slavery.

Now, let us examine in somewhat more depth the responses of the older children to the slavery questions, first an eighth grade girl:

S: .. if there were no rules or laws against slavery?

I: No, it would not be right because everyone was created equal. Everybody has the mentality to do things the same as others.

S: If they pass a law that says it is all right?

I: It depends on the situation in the country and how the people would think about or have opinions on the subject.

An eighth grade boy put it this way:

S: The whole world should be free. Who should be able to say who's free and who isn't?

I: And if there were a law saying it was right?

S: A law shouldn't make a difference.

The stress on equality and freedom in responses to questions of the first type is similar to the answers of the younger children, though the older children give somewhat more detail. It is the responses to the question about a law actually instituting slavery where the age differences are most striking. The younger children often focussed either on taking care of one's slaves, on paying them something, or on the personal authority of the leader of the government (who, in the view of the fourth grade boy, is responsible for all law making). The older children are more likely to refer the issue to some concept of the popular will and are less likely simply to accept the law. At least they will criticize the leader and call attention to the ramifications of such an action, as this eighth grade boy did:

I: ...if there were no rules or laws against slavery?

S: No, people should be able to do their own thing.

I: What if they made a law saying it was right?

S: They wouldn't get along with other countries.

I: What if the leader of the country said it was OK?

S: He wouldn't be a good leader.

In summary, if a country was described where slavery was not prohibited by law, the children were unanimous in condemnation. As soon as they were asked to consider a law attempting to legitimize slavery, children appeared to reason as follows: "I have been told that there are reasons for the laws I know. If there is a law allowing slavery, there must be reasons for it. It must be my job to think up what that reason might be." The older children reason from a broader base and make judgments which refer to societal institutions in a less rigid way.

Right to freedom of movement and residence -- One hundred percent of the children interviewed believed that it would not be right, "if the government passed a law saying that people had to live in the same place all the time and never move to or visit any other part of the country." The large majority of them referred to "freedom" as the justification. None mentioned equality (which was frequently cited for slavery). A fourth grade girl responded as follows:

No, you should be able to leave and go places like other people. You're a free person and should be able to do it.

Some of the younger respondents gave the situation a personal referent:

> No, I'd like to see the world. I'd be so bored to stay in one place.

Younger children in general tended to reason from the perspective of the individual (wanting to see one's family). At the eighth grade, the justifications were often considered the welfare of society, for example, national security. An eighth grade boy responded to restriction of residence as follows:

> If people did something wrong, it probably would be all right. Otherwise, they shouldn't have to stay there. People should be free. If their services were really needed, though, it would be right for the government to plead with them to stay.

Older respondents often referred to some concept of the public good when asked whether doctors, for example, could be asked to go to a remote part of the country. Their usual response was that they could be asked but not required to do that. Children also seemed to have considerable empathy for individuals who must live under restrictions of residence; they might feel bored, isolated, trapped, or shut in.

Right to a fair and public hearing and not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention -- The question concerning this right was phrased as follows: "Suppose that a group of people in another country decided that in their country it was all right to put someone in prison for several years without going to court and having a trial. So they had no laws saying that people should have a trial before being put in jail. Would that be right?" Almost ninety percent of the children argued that it would not be right because the person might be innocent and should have an opportunity to prove it. Although in response to the first type of question, almost all thought arbitrary arrest and imprisonment were wrong, when pressed some gave situations in which they thought it might be right. This was usually when the child felt it could be argued that there was no doubt about the act of which the person was accused, or when it was an especially violent crime. One illustration is this answer from a sixth grade boy:

> Yes, it would be right not to have a trial if the guy is crazy, and there were tons of eyewitnesses that saw the person do it. But you need a real good reason.

A sixth grade girl justified deprivation of trial on the following grounds:

> It would be OK not to have a trial if a person committed a bad crime like murder and everybody knows. He doesn't deserve a trial.

These responses were, however, in the minority. The age differences on this question were not particularly striking.

Right to education -- Children were asked, " if there were a country where a group of people decided that some kids could go to grade school and some kids could not, would that be right?" About eighty percent of the respondents thought that it would be wrong; the reason usually given was that people who didn't get an education would not be able to get a

job and support a family. Equality of opportunity to fit oneself into a productive role in society (rather than just personal support) was a common theme, especially for the older children. A fourth grade girl responded in this way:

> No, it should be that kids should be able to go to school If they don't get an education, they don't get a good job.

Some eighth graders used similar reasoning:

> No, because kid who didn't wouldn't be able to get a job and would just lay in the streets. Without an education, kids wouldn't know nothing, how to fill out forms or anything.

One might argue that although this student believes in the value of education, some of its benefits (at least those of lessons in English grammar) have not been realized.

A number of eighth graders considered reasons which none of the younger children mentioned.

> If it's for the benefit of the country, it could be right as long as they get some education of some sort. But it's never really right not to let them go to school.

Younger children show much less evidence of concern for the preservation of society through education or of the role that society plays with respect to education.

Right to take part in government -- Children were asked, "what if the law said that a small group of people in a country would make the decisions for all the rest of the people in that country, but never asked the people what they thought or let them vote, would that be right?" Only one student out of thirty nine believed that it would be right. The fourth graders' reasoning often centered around the act of voting for the leader of the country.

> No, because some people might not want someone as mayor and should be able to vote.

The sixth graders' reasoning more often compared the small group with the larger group without considering the mechanisms of relation:

> No, a small group has a different mind. They'd only be thinking of themselves. The whole country should make up the laws.

It was primarily in the eighth grade that mention was made of the representative character of government:

> No, a group would be doing what they want. They wouldn't know what to make them (laws) on. They should have representatives and stuff so they can find out.

The theme of excessive concentration of power was also mentioned by the older students. In general, the older respondents considered the long range consequences of a small group in control while the younger ones

failed to see much beyond a particular individual or a particular election.

The right not to be subjected to torture -- The children were asked the following qustion to assess their acceptance of this basic right to personal integrity: "What if someone in another country was arrested, and the police really thought that he was guilty. But the person wouldn't admit it. Would it be right for the police to beat the person to get him to admit to the crime or to get evidence?" This question was asked only in the second phase of the study, so the number of respondents is only nine. Only one of them thought it would be right (and he changed his mind over the course of answering the question). The fourth graders were somewhat more likely to think up reasons justifying torture in response to the second question (where a law instituting itwas mentioned). For example, one fourth grade girl said:

> You could put him in jail to get a confession. You could give him no food but only for a couple of days. If there is no confession, it might be all right to threaten, but not to really do it.

A fourth grade boy answered:

> No, but you could ask about it. Don't hurt him, but maybe threaten a little. If the law said it was OK, I suppose it would be OK if he was found five or six times. Otherwise, it would be wrong.

In contrast, only one eighth grader even hinted that beating someone up could be sanctioned even if the law said it was permissible. One eighth grade girl said,

> No, you should have proof or a witness. No, it would only be right to put him in jail. If the law said it was OK, you could do it, but it still wouldn't be right.

In this case the existence of a law has some effect, but it would not create a right from a wrong.

Two other questions were asked which dealt with social and economic rights. One asked what should be done when people got too old to work and didn't have any money saved up: the second asked what should be done if a person could not make enough money to feed his family no matter how hard he worked. All fourth graders thought that something should be done about the problem, and that the government should be the agency to do something. Two of the eighth graders (out of nine) believed that the people should have saved their money.

Several questions dealing with social conventions were included. There were some comprehension difficulties with some of them. Questions which dealt with calling the teacher by her/her first name, writing from the bottom of the page to the top, using wood chips for money, changing the rules of a game, and shaking hands with the left hand did seem to be clear. Younger children were mixed in their responses.

All the older children believed that doing something which represented a change in a social convention was fine as long as people agreed. This was in direct contrast to the questions concerning human rights (moral) issues, where the respondents seldom (if ever) thought a violation was acceptable.

In summary, children from about nine to thirteen view slavery, enforced residence, restricted schooling, arbitrary arrest, lack of representative government, and torture as universally wrong. When one raises questions about the weaving of these rights into laws and what one should do when the general welfare or the public will conflict with these rights, children have greater difficulties. It was usually the older children who spontaneously mentioned the public will or the welfare of society in their reasoning and who reflected a complex view of social institutions.

A second purpose of the study was to determine what the recognition level was for the term "human rights." Seven out of twenty fourth and sixth graders said they had never heard it. It is of interest to note that the definitions of human rights given by students who said they had heard the term before and by those who said they had not heard it were indistinguishable. Many, we presume, were assimilating information gained from the interview with bits and pieces of previously acquired knowledge. The definitions given by the fourth and sixth graders were similar:

> The chance to do stuff, vote, drive a car, own a house, run a business--stuff like that.
>
> Go somewhere if you want, vote, drive a car, leave the country.

The younger children gave very concrete responses. The answers given by the eighth grader were generally more abstract and dealt with more general issues;

> The rights we have in our country--you can do what you want if you're not breaking the law.
>
> Rights that all are able to have and so they like what they're doing in life. Live, do what they want, not have to do something, talk how they want.

The responses of some eighth graders also demonstrated the influence of social studies instruction on the Constitution of the U.S. An eighth grade boy defined human rights as:

> The rights preserved from God, in the Constitution the first ten amendments. It means you can speak out in the government, freedom of the press, meetings about something people don't like.

A certain amount of national egocentrism is evidenced in children even in classes which do not currently have their attention directed to the Constitution. When asked, "what kinds of rights do people who live in other countries have?," more than half of the students compared them with those in the United States. One boy even gave a quite sophisticated analysis of the difference between rights in the Soviet Union (where the

government protects you from drugs) and those in the United States (where individual rights may cause drug traffic to be more serious).

There is also evidence of another type of national egocentrism. When respondents were asked, "how do you think people in other countries could get more rights?" or "what can the U.S. do to help people in other countries get more rights?", more than fifty percent answered that others could compare themselves with the United States and "use" some of our rights. Other responses given to that question were "protest", "rebel", or "have our president talk to their president and tell him it is unfair." A few students were asked how people in other countries could tell if a law was fair and responded that the law could be compared to laws we have in the United States.

Only three of the thirty children interviewed in the first part of the study mentioned the United Nations in response to the question, "is there any organization which could help people get these right?" The vast majority are unaware of international organizations in any more than the vaguest fashion. American children see the U.S. Constitution and not international instruments as the standard for judging and comparing in the human rights area. This is true in spite of the fact that when the provisions of the Universal Declaration are presented to them, they subscribe to them almost unanimously.

Conclusions

The children interviewed in this small sample believe that transgressions against rights guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be wrong even if no laws existed against such action and, in some cases, even if laws promted such violations. There is considerable consensus on this even in children as young as nine. It is evidence, though certainly not conclusive, for the possible existence of a deep structure of basic respect for humanity (of which respect for human rights in an important manifestation). Violations of basic human rights are matters within the moral domain which do not depend on any particular social-stuctural arrangement, although American children when pressed to refer to some institution mention the U.S. President or the U.S. Constitution.

The results also suggest that older children think about human rights in somewhat different terms than younger children do. It is harder for all to decide why an action is wrong or to say that an action which is in conformity with a law in another country is wrong (even though their first reponse is that they feel it is wrong). Older children are more likely than younger ones to see the problems of human rights interwoven in a context with the wishes and needs of the individual and the good of society. They are more likely to refer implicitly or explicitly to a social contract.

This paper reports a study which is only a pilot for a much more wide ranging study of the links between individuals and social institutions. Many questions remain unanswered (or even unaddressed). What are the implications of the child's understanding of rights for the exercise of such rights and for the development of a sense of social respon-

sibility? On the basis of more detailed follow-up questions, would it be possible to delineate stages in conceptions of human rights? What role do other social cognitive abilities play (e.g. perspective taking, reciprocal reasoning, the ability to view hypothetical situations). If there is no evidence for stages, are there developmental dimensions which account for the changes with age? Is it appropriate to consider the basic human rights as issues of morality in all other cultures, or, at least, in most other cultures? How do the responses differ if the child is asked to judge violations within his own country or asked about violations in other countries? How do societal concepts influence concepts of rights?

For all the questions this study raises, however, it does suggest with some certainty that concepts of basic human rights are not beyond the grasp of individuals in middle childhood and that these concepts are part of the moral domain identified in social cognition research.

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